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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

March 8, 1994

Mr. Jim Ingram, President
Mineral King District Association
1744 E. Caldwell
Visalia, CA 93292

Dear Mr. Ingram:

I would like to thank you and the other Mineral King users for meeting with me last month and for your follow up letters.

As promised, I spoke with Mr. John Krebs, who represented the Mineral King area in Congress at the time the area was annexed to Sequoia National Park and co-authored the legislation to do so. His analysis and that of his former staff is that the eventual termination of leases (upon the death of the lessee) was clearly an objective of the evolving and completed legislation. Your organization has indicated evidence supporting the opposite view, which I would encourage you to share with my staff.

I would point out that, regardless of expressed or implied congressional intent in 1978, a current (or future) Congress could take a different course. Your objective to amend P.L. 95-625 follows this approach. Clearly, this would be the most comprehensive means of resolving the issue, but my analysis is that such an effort would be vigorously opposed by the committee leadership, administration, and many environmental groups.

Losing a legislative fight on the issue would almost certainly seal the fate of your group by demonstrating a negative congressional intent. This would make it all but impossible to pursue an administrative or litigated solution. Because of this, I favor pursuing administrative options before making a decision as to whether or not to support a legislative solution. This will also give your group additional time to weigh all of the potential solutions to your problem.

In support of this initial administrative approach, I am enclosing a letter that I sent today to the director of the National Park Service. I would also like to address some points that you raised in your February 18 letter:

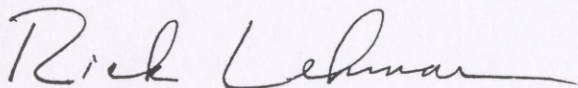
1. I would not think that park professionals would retaliate against a member of your group for exercising your rights on what obviously is an extremely important and heartfelt matter. We will all benefit from an open dialogue and free exchange of information. Please let my staff or Superintendent Ritter know if your members perceive anything less than courteous and professional service from your federal workforce.

2. Your expectations for public comment and involvement in any changes to the Mineral King management plan are legitimate, and no shortcutting of this process will be permitted.

3. The National Park Service does not have the authority to designate an area as Wilderness as the term is used in a legal sense. It is, however, within its mission to determine through management plans (which include public input) that a given area should be returned to a more natural condition. To answer your underlying question, my oversight role requires that I compel the Park Service to include public input in the development of management plans, to consistently apply their plans, and to meet congressional intent when doing so.

I hope this clarifies my approach as we work together in an effort to resolve this issue for the benefit of Mineral King and all of us who enjoy this very special place.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Rick Lehman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

RICHARD H. LEHMAN
Member of Congress

rhl/dw